Castlemaine Naturalist

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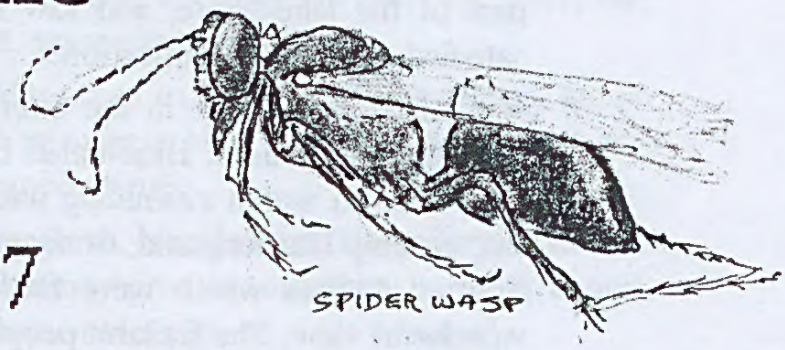

Unusual Visitors at 61 Hunter Street

During early January for a few days my daughter and I observed two colourful parrots feeding quietly on the large creamy blossom of an unidentified eucalypt at the rear of our neighbours's property. They were shy and elusive and kept well out of sight under the canopy, making it very difficult to pick up an overall glimpse of the colours apart from the blue "cheeks". Eventually they moved briefly to the fruit of a Mexican Cyprus in our backyard, and a clear view through the binoculars revealed that they were Crimson Rosellas *race Adelaidae* - according to Simpson and Day. The confusion arose because they were not fully mature, and retained a few areas of bright green on back and wings.

They have not been back since those four days in early January.

Shirley Parnaby

Wendouree Excursion

Only half a dozen members met with four of the Ballarat club to explore the North Gardens Wetland Project on the northern edge of Lake Wendouree on 15/2.

Begun in November 2000 and completed in March 2001, the project has a multiple purpose - to decrease the rate of water flowing into the lake and the amount of sediment carried into the lake, to reduce pollutants and to provide habitat for wildlife. This was seen to be needed because of the increased housing north of the Ballarat Gardens - storm water, with all its sediments and rubbish, was often flooding the road and flowing into the lake.

It is seen as a demonstration processing system for storm water where, in a high profile site, it will be seen by something like I million visitors annually.

We certainly found the project very interesting. The highest pond was almost full, though there was less water in each succeeding one. The first pond has a circular trap with bars to stop large pieces of rubbish going into the system. There are plantings, mainly indigenous, over the earthworks, some of the old trees, such as the swamp Cypress, have been retained and the birds are already making good use of it. One species spotted in that area

was a Little Grass Bird. Later, after lunch under the trees, we walked along part of the lake shore, and saw Reed Warblers for comparison, so were satisfied with our identification!

Also on the lake in the afternoon we saw a number of bird species, including Hardheads, Blue-billed Ducks, a Crested Grebe family which we were able to watch swimming under the clear water, five Freckled Ducks, two Swamp Harriers, and, to my great delight, a first for me, two Australian Spotted Crakes which were feeding near the boardwalk, and we had a wonderful view. The Ballarat people were able to assure us that the birds are seen fairly regularly, often around the same spot, though early morning is the best time to look for them. Altogether we listed 41 bird species.

All this was either despite, or perhaps because of, the Rowing Regatta being held on the south side of the lake.

It was really a most enjoyable day, and despite being rather warm, it was very pleasant under the trees and near the lake. Thanks again, Ern.

Rita Mills

Ian Johnson's Specimen Ridge Enquiry

Various methods are being used by land carers to fix up the effects of Industrious Man. Most involve planting of shrubs in gullies and dampish places.

It is of more significance to examine the natural consequences of natural recovery on a very hard rocky ridge, particularly as before the gold rush there were substantial trees there.

This ridge was mainly clear felled between 1853 and 1908, and there are few trees that are not regrowth from stumps or trees less than 50 years old.

The great growth of shrubs that is supposed to replace clear felled forest just is not there. There are occasional small pines from the events of one year in the main, where pines grew at some distance from the plantations. All are growing amongst rocks. There are patches of Cassinia and small patches of seedling eucalypt growth, but much is sheet erosion.

During this drought it is easy to see the effects of natural recovery.

The major trees growing from self seeding are Red Stringybark, but many of the original big trees were box trees. Young boxes are there, but mainly from stump regrowth.

It is evident that the regrowth on this ridge develops in debris and small rocky areas, although big Red Stringybarks are found in gully flats.

In wet years seedlings grow thickly in these debris areas, and where water flow is constant on hill sides, trees grow well, but in drought years they do not survive. Not only do they look unfit and develop rot, but they fall over. This makes new debris beds, and if firewood collectors keep away, new seedlings will grow once more.

The fallen trunks are food for termites, ants are abundant and marsupials are very abundant, making loose soil ledges all over the place, but most often under very healthy trees, scarce as they are.

The edges of the loose soil ledges tend to support herb seedlings, so, in time, the place will become what it must have been 150 years ago. There are still plenty of uncommon plants in good years.

What is missing is Gorse, Spiny Rush, blackberries, Cape Broom and all the usual environmental weeds. This may give us something to think about. Which is better for the soil? Environmental weeds or sheet erosion?

Another question is about the way the original woodland developed before Industrious Man arrived. It must have taken very many years to develop the original trees, and that before any (water) races caused some big trees to grow by the races or environmental weeds to thickly cluster below them.

All over the place we have two kinds of fallen timber - that bulldozed over and that naturally falling over. Strange to say, more seedling trees survive in the bulldozed areas. Probably the soil disturbance was significant.

It is worth inspecting the barer parts of the bush in drought to see how Nature recycles, slow as it is.

Ian Johnson

Currency Creek Arboretum

At Goolwa, not far from the Murray mouth, and looking across to the Southern Ocean and Hindmarsh Island, Dean Nicolle is realising a dream which began when he was sixteen, and is planting an arboretum, "realising the botanical fiction of Murray Bail's novel *Eucalyptus.*" Now 28 and a PhD student, from Flinders University, he is "well on the way to growing specimens of each and every eucalypt from within Australia..."

He has chosen the site carefully, and is keeping careful records of each and every planting, their survival, growth rate, first flowering etc. etc.

It is a totally private project, (including the collection of seeds, mainly by Dean and his father, Bob, who have driven all around Australia looking for seeds for the 2000 seed collections) and is funded entirely by Dean and his family.

This venture is open to the public, and Dean takes great pleasure in taking visitors around his Arboretum on open days, so, if you are travelling down Goolwa way you might find this a delightful and informative place to visit.

This information comes from the Brigge, the friends of Burrendong (NSW) Arboretum's newsletter, thanks to Penny Garnett.

Observations

• Shirley Parnaby writes that the Drooping Mistletoe on the fine-leafed peppermint in their garden is in full bloom, and the Mistletoebids are making the most of it, as are many others, including Crimson Rosellas, honeyeaters and Red Wattlebirds.

• Half the cypress trees in a street near Fryerstown cemetery appear to be dead.

• There were a number of reports from widespread locations that European Wasps are around again.

• Barbara Maund has found Coffee Bush seedlings in her garden.

• Ern Perkins brought a large black Spider Wasp to the meeting. It was brought to him for identification after someone had been stung. These wasps are a native species, as use spiders as a host for the larvae.

• A flock of 20-30 Rainbow Bee-eaters were first heard and then sighted in a large Grey Box at Barkers Creek by Geoff Harris.

• Hans van Gemert has been watching Crimson Rosellas taking up residence in one of the nesting boxes at the house, but for 2 or 3 days Sugar Gliders took over the box.

• Ern And Lesley Perkins were asked by a town resident to identify a dead hawk which they found on their front verandah. It proved to be a juvenile Brown Goshawk, but what caused it's death is a mystery, though rumors of baits being laid in that area were heard after this report.

• A female Speckled Warbler seen again in McManus Rd. Rita Mills

NOTE: A written note of observations to Rita or Geraldine will ensure accurate reporting.

Gower School Birds

Philip West has again sent a bird list for Gower School, this time he has added lists for Kalimna Park, on the same day, and a walk to the gardens and back the next day.

Gower School environs 26/12/02, 9.25 - 11.15 am

Galah, 2 seen
Fuscous Honeyeater, numerous, both seen and heard
Australian Raven, 1 s, 2 h
Magpie, 2 s
Red Wattlebird, 3 s, 2 h
Superb Fairywren, 5 s, 1
White-browed Babbler, 3 s
Eastern Rosella, 3 s
Grey Shrike-thrush, 2 s, 1 h
Crested Bellbird, 2 s, 1 h
Brown Treecreeper, 2 s
Chestnut-rumped Heathwren, 1 s
Willie Wagtail, 1 s
Dusky Woodswallow , 2 s
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater, 2 s
Common Bronzewing, 1 s
Welcome Swallow, 1 s
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike, 1 h
Spotted Pardalote, 3 h

Kalimna Park environs, 26/12/02, 6.05 - 7.05 pm

Magpie, 6 s
Rufous Whistler, 2 s, 2 h

Grey fantail, 1 s
Common Bronzewing, 5 s
Collared Sparrowhawk, 1 s
Brown-headed Honeyeater, 1 s
Striated Thornbill, 3 s
Little Raven, 1s, 1h

Walk, Kennedy Street to Botanic Gardens and return, 27/12/02, 11.00 - 12 noon (all seen)

Sulphur-crested Cockatoo, 16
Blackbird, 2
Goldfinch, 1
House Sparrow, 2
Red Wattlebird, 1
Dusky Moorhen, 7 +
Pacific Black Duck, 40 +
Magpie Lark, 1
Wood Duck, 14
Little Pied Cormorant 3
Silvereye, 2
Striated Thornbill, 3
Kookaburra, 2, one holding a whole mouse and calling at the same time
Crimson Rosella, 2
Grey Fantail, 2
Rufous Whistler, 1
Superb Fairy Wren 1
White-browed Scrub Wren, 1
Southern Boobook, 4. All in the same tree, including 2 immatures
Brown Thornbill, 3
Yellow-faced Honeyeater

Philip West

More Magpie Behaviour

Twice during early February I have seen a Magpie apparently burying food for later use. The first time I watched as one of our local flock took a large curl grub out of the leaf litter, bashed it, and ate part of it before poking it into leaf litter again with its beak. I thought that perhaps, because of its size it may not have been very tasty, but on 18/2 I watched the same Magpie with a piece of left over cats' meat that I'd thrown out. It was picking pieces off and eating them, occasionally bashing it as if it were a grub, and finally it picked up that piece and another smaller one that had been broken off, trotted over to the edge of the "garden" and poked it into the base of the Flax Lily growing there. Has anyone else observed this behaviour?

Rita Mills

The New Parks

Guest Speaker: Anne Casey, Ranger in Chief, Northern Goldfields Area
14/2/03

Work began in 1996 to protect more of the 17% of original Box/Ironbark cover that remains in the state and the park was formally declared on Nov. 30th 2002, after lots of government and community liasing. While it is acknowledged that Box/Ironbark bushland is not pristine, it is certainly worthy of conservation and the new legislation effectively doubles the area protected. It is hoped that the park's extensive consultation will continue with grievance processes put in place (to liase with beekeepers

etc.), management plans and advisory groups to be established for each park, and conservation management networks developed.

The new area is unusual in that it very dispersed in nature:-

NATIONAL PARKS: Greater Bendigo; Heathcote-Greytown; St Arnaud Range; Terrick Terrick; Chiltern-Mt. Pilot; Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

STATE PARKS: Kooyoora; Paddy Ranges; Broken-Boosey; Warby Range; Reef Hills.

REGIONAL PARKS: Bendigo; Maryborough; Mt. Alexander; St Arnaud Ranges; Ararat.

All National Park Acts result in greater protection but the protection varies according to the type of park. State parks allow dogs on leads. Regional parks are recreation parks for use by nearby populations where horses, dogs and bikes are allowed. Cultural heritage sites are concerned with development of things like the Eldorado Dredge. Special areas have been allocated in the Greater Bendigo and Heathcote-Greytown Parks for locals to walk dogs in recognition that these areas are near populated areas.

LOGGING? - No.

PROSPECTING (use of non-mechanical hand tools) will continue wherever currently permitted. Currently available areas will be gazetted and areas where prospecting can't occur must be shown. Prospecting can occur everywhere else, however any excavation must be kept to minimum and any damage must be repaired the same day (which might prove difficult given the present shortage of staff).

MINING The big companies want to retain the right to mine for gold but no new licences are to be issued. Any mining under parks has to be 100m down with negotiation for air vents etc. There is to be no open cut mining so entrances to mines must be outside parks and down to 100m before entry under park. All waste is to be removed from park (eg. Newtown Mine) and unused tunnels refilled.

TIMBER INDUSTRY The State forest has been reduced by 40%. Harvesting timber for poles, sleepers and firewood and re-employment of timber workers thinning forests are all issues to be re-examined. Household fuel will be available in some areas but only where there is excess timber, and availability of natural gas is to be taken into consideration. Investment in plantations and wood lots is to be considered. Collection of timber for production of eucalyptus oil, post and pole licences, firewood collection and grazing in parks is to be phased out as licences expire.

EFFECT OF NATIVE TITLE. There will continue to be issues to resolve and so our relationship with Aboriginal groups will continue. Although the Yorta Yorta claim has been rejected we are still working with them. We are still working with aboriginal elders in the Grampians. We are working

locally with Brien Nelson in the Parks Vic office. These are fruitful relationships.

FUNDING Present funding consists of some new money and some redirected funds but it is insufficient. At present there are just eight staff for 150 parks and environmental pressure for increased funding has waned. There is a role for groups such as Castlemaine Field Naturalists to pressure for further funding and to maintain the pressure to make sure that these parks are being well managed. This is even more important in light of the fact that the present fires are costing the department $1million a day!

The key focuses of the budget are cultural heritage, visitor site development, pest plant and animal management and ecological management strategy. Twenty-two of the twenty-six Landcare Groups in Castlemaine district work in our parks. We need to work together to tackle the huge weed problem that has developed over a very long time. Many of the worst areas are the outer edges of parks and within 10m strips along roadways. We need to look at the current state of bushland areas and at what particular species are in decline in order to work towards increasing species numbers. We want to encourage citizens to contribute to management and development of ecological management strategies that look at the numbers of large hollow bearing trees; understoreys; retention of fallen trees for habitat; ecologically driven thinning of trees; weed control and a greater focus on biodiversity.

FIRE PROTECTION All parks are managed "tenure blind" for fire protection. In recent times burning has only been carried out if conditions were perfect. This will have to be revised and burning done on less than perfect days accepting the patchy burns that will result.

All in all there is a huge job to be done.

Report from Geraldine Harris

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 20/2/03

Welcome to new member, Simon Kennedy.

John Cole was welcomed, and John Turnbull welcomed back onto the **committee**, and Margaret Badminton's contribution acknowledged, as she had decided to stand down for the time being.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club,
PO Box 324,
Castlemaine.
Incorporation #A0003010B

Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the Club.

Reminder - Articles, reports and observations for the CN can be left with Noellene at Tonks Bros., Barker St. if that is more convenient for you.

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions leave promptly at the times stated from **The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street**, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are **NO excursions on total fire ban days.**

Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Visitors are welcome at club meetings and excursions.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club, March 2003 Programme

Fri. Mar 14. *Flora of Tasmania*. Speaker is Phil Collier. 8pm, UCA hall.

Sat. Mar 15. *Coliban Channel, Taradale*. Leader, Margaret Willis. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp. You will be able to walk just a short distance, or walk the full 13 km if you prefer. Take drinks, afternoon tea. Wear suitable footwear, and carry a backpack if you intend walking the full distance. There will be a car shuffle if anyone wants to do the full walk.

Fri. Apr. 11 *Maintaining Diversity in Mount Alexander Shire*. Speaker, Geoff Parke. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat Apr. 11 (8.30 the on Monday 14 if the weather is unsuitable on Saturday). *Roadside Cleanup*. Meet near Taits Carriages, 8.30. Remember the more people to do the job, the quicker we'll be. Gloves and safety vests provided. Wear sturdy footwear.

Sat Apr. 12 *Looking at the Effects of Drought, Muckleford Forest.* Leader is E. Perkins. Leave the Octopus at 1.30 sharp.

Sun. May 4. *Ballarat FNC visiting* the area. All day excursion. Details later.

Fri. May 9 *Insects,* Alan Yenn. Allan Yenn has been surveying the Eltham Copper Butterfly colony found in Kalimna Park. UCA hall, 8pm.

Sat. May 10 *The new Walking Trail on Mount Alexander*. Leader is R. Piesse. Leave from the Octopus at 1.30pm. Wear sturdy footwear.

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2003 Committee - C. Morris (President) 9985 4221, J.Turnbull (VP and Grievance Officer) 5474 3035, G Broadway (Secretary) 5472 2513, H van Gemert (Treasurer) 5472 1082, E Perkins, R Mills (Newsletter Ed & Public Officer), G Harris, (Ass't Newsletter Editor), B Maund, M Oliver R Piesse and J Cole.

Subscriptions for 2003 -

Ordinary membership: Single $22, Family $30

Pensioner or student: Single $19, Family $24.

The subscription includes postage of the *Castlemaine Naturalist.*
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